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Abstract

All professional persons engage in a number of activities, but they perform one major function, and their profession is designated by a word which indicates this major function. Counselors are usually called guidance counselors, partly because of their many other activities besides counseling, and partly because many counselors do little or no counseling, but rather direct and control. If another term is needed, perhaps psychological counselor would be more valid. In vocational counseling, the counselor does not guide students into particular occupations or fields. The focus of counseling - vocational counseling - is upon the interests and abilities of the client and their implications for vocational development and choice. The client's exploration and thinking should be free of constraints or restrictions on the opportunities and demands in society. Only in the final choice should these external "reality" factors enter in. Society and industry should not suffer from such an approach, since each individual would be enabled to do that for which he is best suited and in which he is most interested. The function of a counselor is to help the student find a vocation which utilizes his abilities and satisfies his interests and needs, not to guide him along paths determined by someone else. (KJ)

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VOCATIONAL COUNSELING OR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE?*

C. H. Patterson

Let me begin by stating my bias. It is perhaps summarized by the statement that guidance is a dirty word. It is difficult to understand why it persists when we have moved away from what it stands for, and when it misrepresents what counselors do--or should do. Many leaders in the counseling profession, including Wrenn, would like to abolish the word. But we still adhere to it, and almost universally in the popular press, school counselors are referred to as guidance counselors--a contradiction in terms, as I will try to make clear.

Now, I used the word in my 1962 book: Counseling and Guidance in Schools. The reason was that I recognized that counselors do other things besides counseling, and I felt a need to have a term or phrase which would indicate this. But I no longer feel this to be necessary. All professional persons engage in a number of activities. But they perform one major function, and their profession is designated by a word which indicates this major function. It is not considered necessary to have a hyphenated or complex term. Teachers do other things besides teaching, but they are called teachers. Perhaps the overemphasis on noncounseling functions performed by school counselors--such as testing, academic advising and program making, and college admissions--is a reason why some feel that the words counselor and counseling are not sufficient.

Another factor is perhaps the fact that many counselors do no counseling in the professional sense of the word. Many so-called counselors do advise and guide, direct and control. This, of course, is the reason counselors are not perceived as professional counselors, but as a kind of quasi administrator-teacher-clerk. John Hersey, in his novel "The Child Buyer," refers to the counselor as the G-Man (G for guidance). Sean Cleary, Director of Guidance, explained what his training was and what his duties were:

> I was trained as a vocational-guidance counselor. I got my M.A. in education at Perkins State Teachers, studied under Professor Sender, head of the vocational-guidance department, and I met the State requirements in vocational guidance by holding a job as stamp-press operator in the Northeastern States Bottle Cap Corporation in Treehampstead for six months. In other words, I was an expert in how to help high-school students decide what career to follow, how to train for it, how to get a job. So then I was hired into the Pequot system, and I was assigned not only vocational guidance but also psychological guidance for the high school, as well as psychological guidance at Lincoln Elementary, where my office is situated, in a former coat closet. I have seven hundred twenty students. I am also in charge of audio-visual and driver training. I coach basketball. I monitor the library study hall.
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> I give psychological tests, IQ tests, so on. Then I also have to do a great deal of nursemaiding of both children and mothers, and I give parents what we call parent-teacher therapy. Among students I am supposed to solve and cure insubordination, gold-bricking, dullness of mind, smoking, drinking,

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sexual promiscuity, law fracture, money madness, suicidal selfishness, aggression, contempt for property, want of moral anchorage, fear of failure and of fear.

I think I should tell you I flatter myself that I'm a realist. I think the worst I can call anyone is 'naive' or 'emotional'. This is a tough world, and I've come to regard all gentle and soft feelings, my own more than anyone else's, as slop, bushwa, naivette, sentimentality, and what confounds people who don't agree with me, like Dr. Gozar, is that I'm so often right. I won't say always. It's a jungle world, and I'm dedicated to being as tough as I can, or seeming so, anyway. I'm not afraid of anything except blushing. Quite frankly, the decisive things in this world are position and money, and of these two the former is by far the more important, because money, though it may help with appearances, can never buy prestige or a real power to manipulate. Money power is bogus; that's why so many rich people are unhappy. Command is the only really satisfying wealth.

There is perhaps also a need to indicate what kind of counselor we are concerned about in these days when everyone is a counselor. We have travel counselors, beauty counselors, financial or loan counselors (formerly loan sharks), and now draft counselors--or draft-evasion counselors. I recently was told by a colleague that a local department store had a rug counselor.

I am ready to accept the need, therefore, for a modifier for counselor, and I have proposed that we use the term psychological counselor, as redundant as it may appear, to refer to the professionally trained counselor. I realize that to some the word psychological is a scary word. School counselors and many counselor educators, recognizing their weakness in the psychological area, are afraid of the word. Too many counselor education programs are pitifully weak in this area. Sean Cleary, the counselor in the Child Buyer, when asked if he had psychological training, replied: "There hasn't been time for that as yet." Stefflre, a leader in counselor education until his recent death, is quoted in an article in Life Magazine (Nov. 4, 1966) as saying that "the counselor who thinks he is a psychologist is a dangerous person...a real fat-head." Now a counselor without a doctorate is not, or should not call himself, a psychologist, but his profession is psycholigical in nature, that is, the basic science of counseling is psychology. The basic science of any profession which is concerned with the behavior of people must be psychology. What else could it be?

The trouble with the word guidance is, as I have noted, that it represents a concept or relationship with people which is inconsistent with the increasing emphasis upon individual freedom and choice. We have recognized this right to individual freedom and choice in adults, although perhaps it hasn't been implemented adequately in our society. But with the young, with children and adolescents in the public schools, we have not. This is why the term guidance is so acceptable. The young, it is assumed, cannot be allowed freedom of choice--they must be guided. As a result, we have a school system which, while theoretically committed to developing independence and responsibility in our young people, actually foster dependence. Then, the day after graduation, they are expected suddenly to become independent, responsible citizens. Or, when they enter college and are on their own, they are expected to make all their own decisions and become responsible for their use of time and money. Many can't meet the demands, and flunk out, because they can't be responsible for and budget their time and money and don't have the self-discipline to study when and as much as they should.

Guidance, one counselor-educator (Gerken) has said, is for missiles. You may remember that B. F. Skinner, the psychologist who is now attempting to make teaching a technology, trained pigeons to guide missiles during World War II. Mechanical guidance systems were developed, so that we didn't have to depend on pigeons. But, since pigeons can become guiders, I have suggested that guidance is for the birds. But think of the term guided missiles. Do we want or need guided children?

An illustration of the guidance approach is given in an incident submitted by a school counselor for inclusion in a book of critical incidents in school counseling. The counselor writes as follows:

> I believe that colleges should be training grounds for the intellectually elite, and not for everyone. Since one half of the population has less than average academic aptitude, I believe that at least one half of the population should not go to college. They will not get much out of it; they will only retard others; college degrees won't mean much; and on top of it, going to college for such kids is likely to be a disastrous experience in any event. So, to put it simply, I think some kids should go to college whether or not they are interested or can afford it; and some kids should not go to college whether or not they are interested or can afford it. And I see one of my functions--and perhaps my main function--to advise high school seniors and their parents about the wisdom of any kid going to any college.
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> One of the kids that I saw was Peter who was below average in everything. We had rather complete records on him going back to kindergarten. He had taken about a dozen IQ tests or general academic aptitude tests in his career, and as many tests of achievement, and not a single one of them showed that he was above average. His grades were above average, however, which I assumed to be a function of his docility. He was a 'good' kid, one who did what he was told, who never got into any trouble a spiritless, mild, meek, inadequate boy, with very little spunk, drive, or will. He complied in every way possible, tried his best, but his best was below average in every objective, measurable respect. He had few friends and to put it simply, he just existed.
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> I had seen Peter several times on routine matters and found him to be more or less a lump. Whatever I would recommend, he would accept. He had no ideas of his own. His modal response to almost every question was: 'Hundunno' translated as: 'I don't know.' He was a scared rabbit of a boy.
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> The specific background relating to the incident has to do with a counseling session I had with him relative to what he should do when he graduated from high school. I asked him what he intended to do and I got one of his 'Hundunno' sounds. I asked him what his parents wanted him to do and was told 'college'. Peter had a habit incidentally, of answering questions with one key word. When I heard that he was being considered for college, I was shaken. I knew that he did not really deserve a high school diploma in terms of his knowledge. I was certain that any college would almost immediately throw him out. I felt that there would be traumatic effects on him if he went. I was certain that his parents would be quite upset were he to go to college and not succeed. I felt that it might be quite a financial as well as emotional burden for all concerned, were Peter actually to go to college.

I then told Peter that he should think over carefully whether he really wanted to go on academically beyond high school, and to talk things over with his parents, I also told him to tell them I would be happy to talk with them about the matter. He seemed to understand. The next day his mother called and asked for an appointment. I set it for the first time I had available.

Both of Peter's parents came in, and the session started cordially enough. I told them I was interested in Peter and that I felt that the three of us should discuss what would be best for their son. I went carefully over Peter's tests and objective grades with them, and interpreted his school grades. I then tried to explain to both of them what college was like. (Neither of the parents had gone to college, and there was no college in this town.) I told them that in my judgment Peter had almost no chance to succeed in college and that going there would be most likely burdensome on them as well as possibly traumatic for Peter.

The father nodded from time to time in agreement with me, but the mother just glared at me and I began to realize that she was upset. I continued, trying to be as neutral and yet as persuasive as I could, giving them all the information I had, and trying to let them understand the whole matter from my point of view. I reminded them that this was 'my opinion' and that the decision was 'theirs' and that what was important was "Peter's welfare and happiness.' But I felt that I was not getting through to the mother. Finally I finished and I awaited their reaction.

The mother began to accuse me of not wanting Peter to go to college. She told me that he had always wanted to go, and that when he had come home several nights before he was all shook up and disturbed about what I had told him. She said I had had no right to say what I did. It was none of my business. My business was only to help him select the best college for him, and not influence his decision to attend college. This was the family's decision and not mine. He was now refusing to study or do his homework. He would do poorly on the finals due to me. I had not encouraged him. Where there is a will there is a way. If he had had good grades in high school he would also have good grades in college. What did I know about tests anyway? Which were better indicators of college grades: tests or high school grades? Did only people with high IQs have a right to go to college? Wasn't college to help anyone to use his talents as best he could? What should Peter do now? Become a linoleum layer like his father?

To the last question I answered, 'What is wrong with being a linoleum layer?'

Her answer shocked me. 'Better he should be dead.'

I realized at this point that I was not dealing with a rational woman, but what made this a critical incident for me was her next statement and request. She had thought it all out clearly.

'Peter has a right to go to college and try. My husband and I have worked hard and saved money for this. We want him to enjoy himself at college, and get a chance to learn something which may help him in life. You have now discouraged him. I want you to call him in and undo the harm you have

done. Tell him you were joking, tell him you were mistaken. Tell him anything, but get him motivated to pass his examinations as high as possible.'

Shaken by this scene which had gone so different from how I expected it to go, I looked at the father, who shrugged helplessly. 'I think maybe you ought to do what she says. After all, she is the mother. Peter is our only son. We want what is best. Both of them think he should go. Maybe you ought to go along with her. I see your point. Maybe you are right. But he should get his chance. Otherwise she will always hate you.'

The incident occurred for me right there and then. I closed my eyes and thought carefully. I knew I was <u>right</u> and I was positive the mother was wrong. I knew that Peter should not go to college. I could see the whole thing. My problem was what to do: stick to my guns, tell them this was how I saw things, and that right or wrong I would do what I thought was right, that I was a professional person, hired by the city to give my judgment on academic-vocational matters, etc. Or, should I do what I thought was unwise, go along with the ambitious but unrealistic mother and thereby harm the child? I knew that I really didn't know what the right thing to do was, that the matter might be seen differently by different counselors. But I could not pass the buck to anyone else.

My decision was to go along with the mother. I agreed, called in Peter the next day, and more or less did to him what the mother wanted.

Peter did get into college, and at the end of the first semester came home, and entered his father's business. I called a faculty member at the college with whom I had had considerable dealings with reference to placing students and asked for information about Peter. I was told that he had not adjusted well, that his grades had been very poor, that he had been on academic probation, that my judgment had been faulty in recommending him to them. In the future, he cautioned they would watch my recommendations more carefully. I explained the situation, and the faculty member stated he understood my problem, and that this was a fairly common problem for high school counselors, probably about all that could be done, he felt, was to go along with parents.

This obviously was not counseling, yet I am afraid something like this is the concept many school counselors have of counseling. It was an attempt at guidance. The last sentences bring out a point which is very important in distinguishing between guidance and counseling. The college obviously depended on the counselor to screen and select applicants. Is this a function of the counselor? Not unless he is paid by the college to screen and select applicants--in which case he is not a counselor but a college admissions officer. It is the responsibility of the college to select its students. The high school counselor should not make such decisions. Any student who wishes to apply to any college should be permitted to do so, and the college, not the high school counselor, decides whether he should be admitted.

Now how does this apply to vocational counseling? The vocational counselor does not guide students into particular occupations or fields. He does not select employees for industry. He is not a manpower administrator, directing manpower into fields where there is a shortage and away from fields where there is a surplus. Counseling is not selection and classification. If the counselor, writes

recommendations to colleges and employers, he loses his effectiveness as a counselor, even the opportunity to engage in counseling with students. What student is going to reveal himself and discuss personal problems with a so-called counselor who is going to determine whether or not he gets a job or is admitted to a college? It should be obvious that there is an inconsistency of functions here.

Now it may be that there is a need for someone in the school to write recommendations for employers and colleges, but it should not be the counselor. The use of the term guidance to cover this and other activities fosters the assigning of inconsistent functions to counselors. The counselor represents the individual client, and not society. Colleges and industry perform the function of selection and classification. The counseling of the client toward a vocational choice should be done without any concern for supply or demand, wages or salaries, location of employment, opportunity, etc. This seems to be contrary to all the emphasis on occupational information in counseling. Perhaps this emphasis has led to guidance rather than counseling, with the counselor leading or pushing the client in the way he thinks the client should go, presumably for the good of the client, but perhaps also, though the counselor may not be clearly aware of it, to meet the interests of society and industry--or local employment needs.

The focus of counseling--vocational counseling--is upon the interests and abilities of the client and their implications for vocational development and choice. The client's exploration and thinking during the counseling process--indeed during his vocational development prior to employment, or at least up to specialized preparation and training--should be free of the constraints or restrictions of the opportunities and demands in society. Only in the final choice process should these external "reality" factors enter in. They should not be used by the counselor to guide the client during the process.

I became aware of the importance of this approach some 20 years ago in counseling disabled veterans. I recognized the importance of not restricting the client's exploration too early. The client's interests and abilities should be the primary factors in reaching a choice, and then, if necessary, the choice can be modified in terms of demands and opportunities.

How does this fit in with the interests and needs of employers? Employers cannot expect school counselors to be recruiters, to guide students into openings that happen to be available. The student should choose his occupation without regard to what may be available at any particular time or place, or the number of workers in a particular occupation. Workers are highly mobile today, particularly young workers. If a particular individual wishes to modify his choice after finding that it would require him to move for education, training, or employment, then the counselor can help him explore local possibilities more or less closely related to his choice.

Society and industry should not suffer from such an approach, since each individual would be enabled to do that for which he is best suited and in which he is most interested. The needs of society would, of course, be involved, but in the market place of competition for filling occupations and positions. This is as it should be--a free market place, one not rigged by counselors guiding students. Such a rigged process doesn't work, as was demonstrated by the development of a surplus of engineers when too many young people were guided into this field 15 or 20 years ago.

The function of a counselor is helping the student find a vocation which utilizes his abilities and satisfies his interests and needs, not to guide him along paths determined by someone else.